



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report on HDIM by the Director of ODIHR

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 2, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador Strohal, for your typically comprehensive report on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The record number of NGOs that participated and the quality of their presentations allowed for a serious review of the implementation of OSCE Human Dimension commitments in all participating States. We commend you and your staff for organizing a very successful meeting.

We also thank the many States which actively participated in the HDIM at senior and expert levels. Participation of such officials, who are in a position to follow up on issues after they return home, is important for the success of the HDIM.

In this regard, we listened intently to the discussion on OSCE's election observation, and strongly agree with the overwhelming majority of HDIM participants who voiced confidence in ODIHR's expertise and methodology on election observation and assistance.

We were also interested to hear that so many States support the reappointment of the three Personal Representatives on tolerance for 2007. We encourage ODIHR to continue and strengthen its cooperation with the three Representatives. We strongly support a high-level conference on the Cordoba model to be held in the first half of 2007 in Romania, and hope to adopt a decision to this effect in Brussels at our Ministerial.

As productive as the HDIM was this year, there is always, of course, room for improvement. Many complained, for instance, about the length of the meeting, yet ironically the time allotted to some topics was not sufficient to accommodate all participants who wanted to speak. We would recommend curtailing the use of introducers to allow more time for dialogue and interaction between the governments and NGOs. Participants in these events are generally well-versed in the subject matter and do not require a lengthy introduction of the issue being discussed. In order to give NGOs greater exposure, we may also want to consider setting up informal thematic side events where several NGOs could set up tables to discuss their work and distribute their materials. People could then go from table to table to talk with a range of NGOs.

The side events with NGOs remain a unique feature of the organization of the HDIM, and in our view constitute one of its most valuable elements. During this session, the United States, Belgium and France hosted a side event on Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children. This is one of several areas where we believe the OSCE should focus attention in its Human Dimension events in 2007. Because the OSCE provides an effective platform for regional cooperation in combating such heinous crimes, we have introduced a draft Ministerial

decision on the issue. We believe that an ODIHR seminar on combating sexual exploitation of children would be a meaningful way to follow-up on the proposed Ministerial decision in Brussels.

In addition, the United States would support a supplementary meeting or special HDIM focus on freedom of assembly and association. We must also strengthen ODIHR's capacity to help meet those challenges.

The HDIM and the period since its conclusion underscore the importance of continuing to stand up for human rights defenders and NGOs, who demonstrate on a daily basis courage and perseverance under great pressures. Our organization must continue to stand up for those people who risk so much to effect peaceful democratic change.

In light of the disturbing death in custody of Ogulsapar Muradova, we again renew our request for information on and access to those arrested in connection with the events of November 2002, including our former colleague Batyr Berdiev, as well as other imprisoned activists. It is disappointing that the Government of Turkmenistan chose not to participate in the HDIM. For the fourth year in a row, my government felt compelled to issue a special statement on the situation in that country.

But the problems of human rights defenders are not restricted to that country, and NGOs are under siege elsewhere as well. We were all shocked and saddened by the brutal murder during the term of the HDIM of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. This tragic event was followed a few days later by the closure of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, an NGO that cooperated with Ms. Politkovskaya in her work to uncover human rights abuses.

The United States is deeply concerned by the October 5th sentencing of journalist and human rights activist Ulugbek Haydarov, in Uzbekistan, to six year's imprisonment on charges of extortion and blackmail. Mr. Haydarov is well-known for his coverage of alleged corruption by local officials.

We do not know the full details of his two-day trial in October, since court officials barred outside observers from attending. Media reports, however, have questioned the basis of evidence used in his conviction. In fact, Mr. Haydarov's alleged victim reportedly declared Mr. Haydarov's innocence at the trial.

Once again, our government finds it necessary to express grave concern about the plight of human rights activists and journalists in Uzbekistan. Allowing independent journalists and human rights activists to operate without fear of harm or retribution is a sign of a government that has nothing to hide. So is ensuring that trials are open and fair.

In a number of countries, we see the adoption and application of restrictive NGO laws and burdensome regulations, or extralegal attempts to intimidate NGOs or shut them down. When NGOs are under attack, democracy is undermined.

In that regard, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Alexander Milinkevich, the winner of the European Parliament's 2006 Sakharov Prize. The award recognizes the courage of the political opposition in pursuing democracy in the hostile environment that exists in Belarus today. In congratulating Alexander Milinkevich, the United States is proud to stand with the Belarusian people in their struggle for freedom and democracy.

Mr. Chairman, we have tried to highlight some of the issues that we believe should be priorities for the OSCE and for our governments in the coming months. We look forward to working with you and the participating States to strengthen the implementation of our OSCE Human Dimension commitments.

Once again, we thank you, Ambassador Strohal, for your continuing commitment and good work in the job you do.

Thank you.